

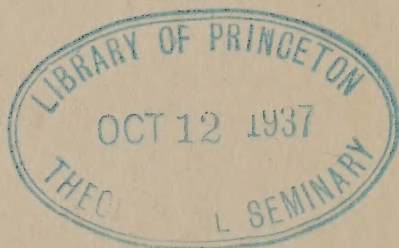
Hazen Books
on Religion

JESUS

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By

MARY ELY LYMAN



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JESUS

MARY ELY LYMAN

Author of *The Christian Epic*



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E. A. YARROW,

For the Edward W. Hazen Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

Days of confusion and trouble have driven many to consider afresh the meaning of Jesus for the experience of men—to ask with a new urgency what help he has for us as we face our difficult world. Many books written in recent years testify to this faith that Jesus' teaching and life are rich with meaning for us, if we know how to understand and appropriate them. By no means all of these attempts thus to interpret his significance for our age have come from the theological world. J. Middleton Murry, British journalist and critic; Mary Austin, American novelist; Giovanni Papini, Italian biographer; D. S. Merejkowski, Russian historian; T. R. Glover, British classical scholar; Winifred Kirkland, American essayist; John Masefield, poet laureate of England; Don Marquis, American journalist and poet—these are but a few of those who, from fields other than that of professional theological study, have served our generation by portraying afresh through drama, verse, biography, or essay this figure from so long ago to whom they have turned for help in the deepest problems of life. In harmony with this widespread quest, this volume has as its purpose the examination of the life and teaching of Jesus with a view to the discovery of his meaning for us.

* * *

To propose such a topic as this is to raise two kinds of question. The first consists of questions that belong to the field of history. Among them are these: What

did Jesus actually do and teach? What was the nature of his own religious experience? What did he mean when he talked about the Kingdom of God? Did he think of himself as the Messiah of the Jews? As Savior of the World? As the founder of a new religion? Was his teaching original, or was it merely a selection from the teachings of the prophets and the rabbis?

The other type of question has to do with his meaning for us. J. Middleton Murry said in the preface to his *Jesus, Man of Genius* concerning the writing of that book: "The time had come when it had become urgent upon me to make up my mind about Jesus." This compulsion comes to most thinking people. One must reckon with a life that has made so much difference to all succeeding history. One must think of it not merely historically, but from the point of view of his meaning for us. This kind of thinking puts to us such questions as the following: Is Jesus significant for us in any unique way? Does his teaching enunciated in a simple, agricultural society nearly two thousand years ago have bearing upon the tangled problems of our disordered world? Why should his death be considered more significant for us than the death of any other great religious leader of the past?

Since this second type of question often depends for answer on the first, let us start with history and try to put down what we know about Jesus. We should not only describe what he did and what he said; but, so far as we are able, press back of the doings and sayings to the experience that lay behind them—to the nature of his own inner life.

This task demands that we first decide how we shall think of the gospels as sources for our knowledge of Jesus' life and teaching. When we take ancient records and make use of them today for historical purposes some assessment of the validity of the materials to be dealt with always has to be made. The view which I propose for our study is that the synoptic gospels¹ (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke) reveal with simplicity and fidelity the impression made by Jesus upon his own generation. They are not biographies in the sense of presenting a sequential record of Jesus' deeds and sayings. They are, rather, portraits of him revealing objectively what he did and what he said. The impression that the thoughtful reader gains from these gospels is that the personality of Jesus far transcends the materials. Profound thought, authentic religious insight, genius for pregnant expression are here in such measure that one who reads with penetration is convinced that the personality of Jesus dominates the record.

This is not the place to discuss the transmission of stories and sayings from the oral tradition to the completed gospels, nor the relationship of one gospel to another in the growth of our present records. It is, however, important for our purposes to recognize the paradox of history in these records, namely, that we know both more and less about Jesus than we know of any other one important figure from so remote a past. We have little in the gospels of what he wore, what he looked like, what kind of house he lived in, and what he

¹The term "synoptic" is applied to the first three gospels because they are similar in synopsis or outline.

did on particular mornings, afternoons, and evenings in the sequence of the days. But of no other figure from his time do we know so much of what is significant—what he thought about life's meaning, how he regarded and treated the people with whom he worked, what characteristic activities, qualities of thought, and modes of expression were his, and what the basic religious beliefs were upon which he built his life.

The temper of true criticism here is to enter with understanding into the *quality* of experience that these gospels so faithfully reveal. There is an authenticity about them in this realm which rises triumphant above minor items of factual detail. It is not that we are without evidence as to matters of fact, for we do know from the gospels how Jesus treated children, what kind of persons he sought to be his disciples, how he responded to questions that were intended to be captious, how he acted when opposition grew hot against him, something of his habits in public and private worship, and many of the everyday experiences that made up his life. That some legends have gathered about him, that the outline of his days and weeks cannot now be completely traced in order, we recognize. But the significant thing is that these gospels have so faithfully recorded what *manner* of man he was.²

² Those readers who wish a further discussion of the nature of our source-materials about Jesus are referred to the Appendix.

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE-STORY OF JESUS

We know little of Jesus' childhood—except that he grew up as one of a number of children in a simple home in Nazareth, that of a carpenter, Joseph, and his wife, Mary. This home was one in which Jewish religion was honored and in which its feasts and festivals were observed. In a normal Jewish home of this type there would be reading and committing to memory of the Hebrew scriptures; and Jesus' use of scripture in his subsequent teaching and preaching would bear out this supposition.

But it is not merely Jesus' familiarity with Scripture that reveals his boyhood. His parables show how much he knew of the intimate, homely side of family life. He knew what the loss of even a small coin meant in a frugal home, and how neighbors shared in its loss and in joy at its recovery. He knew the demands that children make upon their parents, and how a good father responds to those demands. He knew how leaven works in the meal, how lamps have to be filled and ready, how old clothes are patched, and how neighbors sometimes come at awkward moments with requests for help. Weddings, funerals, and the life of the market place were known to him. His parables reveal clearly that he lived among humble people, observed them keenly, and understood their wants and feelings.

To one who visits Nazareth today another factor in the

childhood experience of Jesus is made clear. The little village has much to tell us of his background. Lying in a bowl in surrounding hills, Nazareth is now as it was then, only a little removed from the main road north and south through Palestine. If one climbs to the ridge back of the village, the far view shows the Great Plain of Esdraelon lying to the south, the Jordan valley just to the east, and northward the hills of Hermon. It is a scene of serene and charming beauty. Today this region is not populous, but probably in Jesus' day it was dotted with villages and towns. As today one sees in the far northern distance the snow-clad Lebanons, one can imagine a Hebrew child singing the song of his people:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills:
From whence cometh my help?
My help cometh from the Lord,
Which made heaven and earth.

Jesus' sayings are rich in suggestion of how much meaning there was for him in this background of hills and fields. He found the lilies of the field more beautiful than any glory of man. He knew the signs of the weather—the meaning of red in the sky at sunset. He had noted the ways of both sparrows and eagles; and how the foxes lived. He knew the swift growth of the mustard tree and how the farmer plowed his ground.

Out of this childhood experience in Nazareth must surely have come to Jesus knowledge of the special problem of his people. The position of Nazareth on a trade route from Egypt to the north meant that traders—Syrian, Egyptian, and Phoenician—would be often passing, and Roman soldiers as well. It was not a place re-

mote from the currents of life but was close to the great artery of trade and travel for his countrymen. Jesus must often have heard talk of the bitterness of subjugation to a foreign power, and sometimes suggestions of insurrection against Rome. Thought of his people's heritage in religion and of the relationship of that central treasure of their life to their political situation as subjects of the Roman empire must often have stirred in Jesus' mind as he heard the talk that went on in the market and in the streets of the city in which he grew up.

According to the custom of his people, Jesus was taught a trade—that of his father, who was a carpenter. But as he came to mature life, his trade became secondary to a work which he made his central interest—the work of an itinerant teacher of religion.

We may imagine that he was challenged to accept this vocation of teacher and preacher of religion by the conditions of religious thought and practice which surrounded his life. At this time the religion of his people lacked its old vital power. Two types of interpretation were prominent in the Judaism of his day—one apocalyptic,¹ the other legalistic. Jewish apocalyptic was a deteriorated form of prophetic religion. It sought solutions for life's problems solely in the expectation of otherworldly, supernatural intervention. It was a religion born of despair. Long centuries of submission to other nations had brought to the Jews a sense of frustration consequent upon the defeat of their cherished hopes of

¹The word "apocalyptic" comes from a Greek noun meaning "vision" or "revelation." Apocalyptic forms of religion depend on visions—often visions of the future. "Apocalyptic writings" might be paraphrased, "vision-writings."

cultural and religious independence. Hence there had resulted an attitude of general hopelessness toward this world, and of expectation that supernatural intervention would come to right its injustices. In its extreme forms, apocalyptic thinking tended to become fantastic and grotesque, leaving to one side the sober realities of fact and history, which were the materials with which the prophets had dealt, and giving itself up to dreams and visions of another world.

Legalism, in its later form, had turned away from prophetic religion in another direction. It had overemphasized one side of religion at the expense of others, namely, outward conduct. Attempting to regulate the minutest forms of conduct and achieve perfection through the scrutiny of every minor act of life, it tended, unless carefully guarded, to sterility and harshness. The apocalyptic leaders were always in danger of disregarding this present life because they centered their thought wholly upon other-worldly matters; the legalists were always in danger of regarding the present too closely and becoming absorbed in its trivial details. In extreme forms, legalism argued such questions as the proper length of a Sabbath day's journey or whether rain water was suitable for a ceremonial washing of the hands. Between these two extremes were many Jews who represented a high religious attitude—those Pharisees who treasured with a high reverence the best things of Israel's past, that company of the faithful who cherished an ardent expectation of new and better things for the people of Israel and who, like Simeon and Anna and the parents of John the Baptist and Jesus, lived in piety, keeping faith strong and hope

active. The song of Zacharias, which Luke gives us, sings of his hope for the "dayspring from on high," which should give light to those that sat in darkness, knowledge of salvation, the remission of sins, and guidance into the way of peace. (Luke 1: 67ff.) Many there must have been who followed the lead of the great prophets of the past, and who gave themselves to the highest idealism and purpose; but the two dominant strains of religion in Jesus' day, legalism and apocalypticism, were less noble in conception, less creative in their effects than the prophetic movement of the eighth and seventh centuries B. C. A fresh understanding of the meaning of religion was needed—one that would bring to new and creative expression the ethical emphasis of Hebrew prophetic religion.

A contemporary of Jesus, who undertook such a mission of revival, attempting to arouse fresh devotion to prophetic ideals, was John the Baptist. He accepted a somewhat ascetic mode of life, and withdrew to a desert place to which he was followed by those who were attracted to his message. His influence upon Jesus is indicated by the fact that Jesus went to him for baptism. This was a purification rite which John had taken over from accepted Jewish religious practice but had invested with new meaning as he made it a symbol of repentance and of commitment to a new ethical life fit for the Kingdom of God.

The records all agree that after this baptism from John, Jesus took his own way, not remaining a follower of John, but starting out on an independent career of leadership, as a teacher and preacher. He differed in

method from John in that he chose to go about freely in the villages and towns rather than to withdraw to a lonely place as John had done; and in that he did not favor any ascetic modes of life, such as a special dress or special food. He was once accused of excess in eating and drinking by those who were hostile to him, because he did not live differently from the people with whom he worked.

The nature of Jesus' work is revealed by a series of pictures of him which the gospels give, suggestive of the nature of his contacts with people and of his methods of work. We see him now in a synagogue taking part in the service, now in a home with the people crowding about the door to hear him, now walking along by the sea, teaching as he went. His method of work in general was that of an itinerant teacher.

What manner of person do we see in the pictures that the gospels give us of Jesus? The portrait first of all is of one deeply charged with a sense of mission. His thought about his message, his plan for the method by which it should be given, was worked out in a lonely struggle in the wilderness. When he told of it, he told it in images so bold that no one can read that story of the temptation without seeing that it was an experience that shook his very soul. He went out boldly with his message, at first with a confidence which led him to say that he saw Satan fallen as lightning from heaven. But then came repulse and opposition from the authorities, so that though the common people heard him gladly, he felt that he had come to send a fire upon earth—not peace but a sword. He saw his message dividing fam-

ilies: sister from brother, and children from parents. The urgency of his own thought about it is shown in his words:

I have come to throw fire on earth.
 Would it were kindled already!
 I have a baptism to undergo.
 How I am distressed till it is all over!
 (Luke 12: 49-50—Moffatt's translation.)

He urged men to count the cost before they decided to follow him, and told them that following him meant being homeless in this world. The authorities tried to silence him. His own countrymen drove him out of their cities. Even his family wondered if he was not mad. But what was his to give he *must* give: and therefore he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. When the ultimate tragedy loomed before him, he accepted death by torture rather than a compromise with his ideal.

Again, the portrait is of one who boldly challenged the accepted standards of goodness in his time. There was a sovereign freedom in his actions which called forth such a comment as this:

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house [of Matthew the publican], behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. (Matt. 9: 10-13.)

His free identification of himself with the poor and often

with the despised, his rejection of the merely conventional expressions of religion, his critical selection of the good and ignoring of the unimportant in the law, his unerring judgment upon the hypocrisies and insincerities of the religiously élite of his day, made men see in him an inward authority that was above and beyond what the best of them knew:

He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (Matt. 7: 29.)

This free critical handling of the materials of religion was matched by a penetrating judgment about people. He knew the emptiness of the excuses that were offered him by people who did not have the courage to follow him. He saw some of the leadership of his time as blind leading the blind. He saw beneath the pious shams of those who washed only the outside of the cup. He understood Peter's wavering and impulsive temperament so that the denial was not a matter of surprise to him. He saw how hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The keen, realistic judgment of people that the synoptic portrait of Jesus reveals puts concrete foundation under the Fourth Gospel's statement, "He himself knew what was in man." (John 2: 25.)

But again we see here one whose penetrating, realistic judgment of men was matched by a corresponding faith in the possibilities of human nature. As much by what he did as by what he said, he made clear that the way of life that he taught, the sonship of God in which he urged men to participate, was free to all. The parable of

the soils made it clear that he knew men would respond differently to his message. He did not ask for uniformity of response. In his own group of disciples, one was from the hated class of publicans. He did not refuse the pleading of the Syro-Phoenician woman, but responded, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt. 15: 28). The story of the rejected invitation to the wedding feast says that the final call to the feast was to "both bad and good" (Matt. 22: 10). There was a dynamic quality in his faith in people that freed them from fear and from physical and mental ill health. The woman who had been so long ill and asked for help is described by the evangelist as "fearing and trembling" (Mark 5: 33), but she dared to tell "him all the truth"; and was rewarded by his empowering word to her, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

The combination of realistic judgment with empowering faith in people is made beautifully clear in Luke's story of Jesus with Zacchaeus. The little man who had such curiosity to see Jesus that he climbed a tree to view him was a publican. As a member of that profession he represented the organized entrenchment of greed in the society of that day. But Jesus saw beyond the professional exterior to the inward eagerness of heart, and built upon that eagerness a willingness to take the needed steps that would bring a new quality into his life.

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it,

they all murmured, saying, He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold. (Luke 19: 5-8.)

Together with our knowledge of Jesus' teaching, we need this portrait of his work with people. The urgency of his sense of mission, the resolute will to give what he had to give, this boldness and freedom to challenge the accepted standards of goodness, this realistic understanding of people, this faith in the possibilities of men, and the dynamic quality in his work with them that freed them from sickness and fear, and empowered them to newness of life—all these are significant parts of his work.²

Although the gospels do not make the sequence of events their first interest, it is possible to discover through them a general outline of the events of Jesus' ministry. He began by preaching in his own synagogue in Nazareth, and a good part of his time was spent in going about the countryside, chiefly in Galilee in the region of the Lake of Tiberias. There were times when he withdrew to quiet places for prayer and for fellowship with the small group of a dozen men who identified themselves most closely with him as disciples. His

² Professor William Pepperell Montague sets aside the theological interpretations of Jesus and turns back to this portrait of him at work with men as giving the central meaning of Jesus to the centuries:

"To have discovered and proclaimed the way of absolute beauty, and at the same time to have shown that it is free to all, and then to have lived gently and ardently, and died terribly as a supreme exemplification of his own teaching is *enough*." (Italics mine.) *Belief Unbound*, p. 17.

message and personality made great appeal to the common people, but the freedom and boldness with which he challenged accepted religious ideas and practices frightened the authorities and aroused their opposition to him.

The gospels report that after a time of preaching near the Sea of Galilee Jesus withdrew to the north with his disciples and that a climactic experience took place at Caesarea Philippi. There, in a crucial conversation with his disciples, it became explicit between them that they believed him to be the long-expected Messiah of the Jews. The records suggest that Jesus accepted this belief of theirs as if it accorded with his own conviction, and that this belief on his part was what sent him to Jerusalem to participate in the annual spring festival of Jewish religion, the feast of Passover.

Here in Jerusalem the antagonism to him on the part of professional religious leaders was further intensified by his dramatic act of forcing profiteers out of the Temple. The practice of changing money for those who came to the Temple with offerings had given opportunity for graft on the part of unscrupulous traders, and corrupt men had thus enriched themselves at the expense of the piety of the people. To Jesus, who put integrity and singleness of heart at the very center of religion, such parasitism on acts of religious devotion was intolerable, and he not only denounced it passionately, but drove the offenders forcibly from the Temple.

It was this arresting action on his part which brought to a focus the opposition to him on the part of officials, and precipitated their taking action against him. Jew-

ish religious leadership, thus appealing to Roman political authority, succeeded in bringing him to trial and finally to death. He was betrayed into their hands by Judas, one of his own band of disciples, who probably revealed not the place where Jesus might be found, as is sometimes inferred from the narrative, but rather some facts that had to do with his relationship to his people's hope for a Messiah—either that he did not deny their ascription of Messiahship to him, or that he had confessed his own belief in it. The charge upon which he was tried and sentenced to death was at any rate connected with this claim. The death to which he was condemned was the most ignominious punishment known to his age—death by being nailed upon a cross.

One would expect the story to end here in the recording of a tragically frustrated hope that had centered in his personality, in the recognition that a life embodying in itself a high idealism had come to premature end. But actually it is not so. This was not the end of the story but the beginning. True, the records reveal an immediate sense of defeat on the part of his disciples, a panic of fear that led to the scattering of the group. But not for long. Certain experiences of both individuals and groups convinced them that their leader's spirit was in their midst; and that they had a reality in their corporate life through him that compelled their going on together as his followers, teaching as he had taught, and working as he had worked.

As to how this conviction came to them, there may be differences of view as we interpret the somewhat confused and conflicting records that those momentous days

have bequeathed to us. But the fact that the conviction came to them, and that it was determining in the life of the group—and indeed in all subsequent Christian history—can hardly be doubted. Upon this conviction of Jesus' living reality, shared down through the centuries by generations of Christians, has been built the structure of the Christian Church, and out of it has been woven the fabric of its thought and religious experience. Because of it the creeds have confidently affirmed "Jesus Christ, whose kingdom shall have no end." The *Te Deum* sings of him, "Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers." Hymns address him saying, "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts, thou fount of life, thou light of men." Scripture asserts, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, yea, and forever." Because of it, the Church of Christ is praying yet and working in his name.

CHAPTER II

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Let us turn now to the message of Jesus, and ask what its essential emphases were. In the gospels' report of Jesus' ministry, we found a series of pictures which are representative of his activity, and which suggest to us what his methods of work were. So in the collections of sayings, the stories and parables which the evangelists have assembled, we find certain fundamental religious emphases that were characteristic of him. From the nature of the record of his sayings, it would seem unlikely that he ever tried to develop a comprehensive scheme of thought or ethics. His was rather the method of the prophet, the work of one who shared with others out of the abundance and depth of his own experience the insights that came to him. He did not attempt to formulate or bring full coherence into his message. He spoke as the prophet always does through images, stories, and symbols. He brought out of his treasure-house things new and old. His authority came from experience rather than reasoning. His method was to suggest rather than to expound. What he taught was so inseparably bound up with what he did—his own character becoming so essentially part of his message—that there is something of artificiality in the attempt to state the teaching in any detached way. But there are some central and characteristic emphases to which we can point. Let us now try to state what those were.

At the center of his teaching is a faith which dominates the whole. It is like the treasure hid in a field for which a man might sell all that he has if by so doing he might secure it for his own. It is that one pearl of great price for which all else might well be lost. It is the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven. In Jesus' thought the Kingdom meant the righteous rule of God. About this idea gather all the other emphases of his teaching. It is this rule of God which creates the spiritual order that is the ultimate reality of our universe. It is this righteous sovereignty of God that calls out our trust in him and allows us to think of him as Father. It is this righteous rule of God that compels our thought of all men as potentially God's sons, and hence as brothers of one another. It furnishes the standard for conduct by the conditions it requires for membership in it. The hope for its coming was the mainspring of Jesus' life, and he assumed that it should be the motive power of the action of all those who follow him. In so far as men accept the will of God and live by it, the Kingdom is a present reality; in so far as they reject it, the Kingdom is thought of as in the future. This paradox of the present and of the future is shown in Jesus' prayer: "Thine is the kingdom." "Thy kingdom *come*."¹

Since Jesus nowhere defined in any formal way what he meant by this central idea of the Kingdom, we must find that meaning from the stories and parables in which he tells what it is like, who may enter into it, and what

¹ Scholars divide upon the question as to whether the future or the present is dominant in Jesus' idea of the Kingdom. For a brief statement of the author's view, see p. 21.

its principles are. It is interesting to note how free this teaching is from argument. He did not attempt to prove the basic assumptions upon which it rests. He did not argue, for example, for the existence of God; nor for his nature as personal; nor for his will as righteous. These are assumptions which Jesus accepted naturally from his Jewish heritage of religious thought. Similarly, he did not try to prove that men have free will, and hence are moral beings. He showed no concern with any abstract view of human nature, but assumed without argument that men are capable of becoming sons of God. He gave no moralizing precepts about men's treatment of one another, but appealed rather to their imagination as to the spiritual dimensions of human life. He commended no theoretical position about the organization of society, such as communism or its equivalent, but assumed that, as men accept the rule of God and live under it, they become a spiritual community in which justice and neighborliness and mutual honor and concern for each other as children of God will prevail.

What we find, instead of an argumentative approach, is a series of fresh, pungent, concrete sayings and stories that affirm basic insights about life as it has to do with this central ideal of the Kingdom. God is Father. Jesus finds this the basis of his own experience. He commends the relationship to God that his Fatherhood implies as tested and found true in his own life. He assumes that men are potentially God's sons. If they live in this sonship, they act as members of the Kingdom—going the second mile, turning the other cheek, giving

the cup of cold water, forgiving again and again. They discover certain laws of life as they enter into the Kingdom—that it is the meek who inherit the earth, and the peacemakers who are the children of God. They find themselves in need of forgiveness as they try to exercise the forgiving spirit toward others. Above all, they need the teachable spirit, the expectant attitude, the childlike heart; for God can make his will known only to those who are receptive, who hunger and thirst after righteousness. As they accept the will of God and live as members of the Kingdom, they find it possible not only to take responsibility for those who are in need, feeling for them an outgoing concern and solicitude, but actually to love and pray for those who are hostile to them.

There are many sayings that indicate Jesus' faith and ardent hope that the Kingdom was soon to come, many that show his belief in its supreme worth. Often he shows that it will be difficult for the religiously élite of his time to accept the conditions that it demands—conditions which affect not only outward conduct but also the inner springs of man's motives. It is not merely murder that the member of the Kingdom must avoid, but anger in the heart—not merely adultery, but the impure thought. Repeatedly he makes it clear that ceremonial perfection avails nothing unless accompanied by inward participation in the will of God. God does not care for the self-satisfied praying of one who congratulates himself that he is not as other men are. He does not care for gifts offered upon his altar from one who is unreconciled with his brother. He does not want the calculating service of those who cover self-interest by

making gifts to him which stand in the way of the fulfilment of filial obligation. Single-mindedness, integrity, honesty down to the very springs of life in motive and feeling, are basic to the service of either God or man. At the heart of it all is the conviction that life in the Kingdom is life that accepts and follows the moral will of God—a will that puts value on every personality and finds fulfilment in self-forgetful service of people.

The things that make it difficult for men to enter into this sonship to God and hence into membership in the Kingdom are the love of money, the desire to seem better than they really are, forgetfulness of their brothers' needs, preoccupation with themselves:

And one out of the multitude said unto him, Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me. But he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth. (Luke 12: 13-15.)

How hardly shall they who have riches enter into the Kingdom of God! (Mark 10: 23.)

He condemned those who

say, and do not. . . . But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. (Matt. 23: 3, 5-7.)

The point of the parable about Lazarus and Dives is not that the rich man had done evil to Lazarus, but that he had failed to be aware of the need of the man who lay

hungering and suffering outside his door. (Luke 16: 19ff.) And similarly in the parable of the Last Judgment, condemnation comes because:

I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not. (Matt. 25: 42-43.)

And on the positive side, it is the receptive heart, the spirit sensitive to another's need, that makes one most truly a member of the Kingdom. Those who were called to share in the joy of their Lord in this same story were those who ministered to needs of their brothers.

Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me. (Matt. 25:40.)

He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. (Matt. 23: 11.)

The story that most fully portrays this positive side of goodness is the one of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10: 25-37.) The story came in response to a question, "Who is my neighbor?" The answer was in terms of a concrete example of neighborly conduct. We know nothing of who the neighbor was except that he was "a certain man" in trouble. The one who ministered to him made no outward claims to leadership or special moral excellence. That which distinguished him from those who passed by on the other side was sensitiveness to need, awareness of a distress that he could relieve. "He was moved with compassion." The new character that Jesus would bring about does not come by keeping rules or precepts. It is a matter of spontaneous participation in

the will of God. Those who are members of God's Kingdom come to share his concern that all shall be his children, and hence they fulfil their own true being in serving human need. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise."

We cannot examine these emphases of Jesus' message without realizing that they have to do with the perennial problems of human life. These are not simply the questions of Palestinian Jews in the first century A.D. These are the conflicts that always arise in the hearts of men who long for goodness, and in societies that seek to purify their life of evil. The conflict between possessions and spirituality, between selfishness and another's need, between honesty and the wish to seem better than we really are, between conventional morality and that which is inward and vital—these are problems that are always alive in the spirit of man. The genius of the Master was that he pierced to the very center of our life, and touched upon problems that always recur. The goal that he set before his own disciples was a goal that belongs to the infinite reaches of experience.

When today we consider questions that have to do with class, racial, and industrial relationships, we are considering in terms of our society the ideal of fulness of life for all men that he put into such concrete terms for his own day. Shall we confine the privileges of our society to a few or make them available for all? Shall we use the methods of good will or those of force and antagonism? Shall we assume that men are capable of using responsibility and privilege well, or shall we hold them in bondage because we are afraid of what they will

do with their freedom? Shall we complacently enjoy the blessings of culture, material comfort, and spiritual emancipation while near us are those denied these emancipating experiences? The solutions of these problems are implicitly present in the religious ethic of the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught it.

We have not space to discuss at length the question as to whether Jesus thought of the Kingdom in apocalyptic terms or not. He did take up into his teaching the apocalyptic hope of the Kingdom as about to come swiftly and by divine intervention. But he did not treat it as the contemporary apocalyptists were treating it. He gave new meaning to the thought of the Kingdom by making it completely a moral and spiritual concept. He threw his emphasis on the responsibility of man to live so as to be worthy of membership in the Kingdom. The essential part of his message had to do, not with how soon or in what manner the Kingdom would come, but with the spiritual quality of life that it demanded of its members.

CHAPTER III

JESUS' OWN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Let us ask also what the gospels reveal about Jesus' own religious life. His teaching implies a certain quality of religious experience back of it. Certain events that the gospels report are parts of a spiritual biography, recording crucial spiritual experiences—such as the baptism, the temptation, the transfiguration, the conversation with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, the decisive hour in Gethsemane, the crucifixion. His way of meeting these experiences is revealing of certain determining qualities in the spiritual life that he himself lived.

What then are the events of this inner biography that reveal the nature of Jesus' own religious life? They are few in number but they are highly significant. Here we find the story of Jesus as a young man dedicating himself to God's cause, accepting from a prophetic teacher a symbolic rite of purification and of commitment to God's will. Following this is the story of his wrestling in spirit to discover and follow methods congruous with the cause and task he had accepted. Later there comes a story of a retreat to a mountain top with three of his closest disciples, at which time an experience of exaltation in realizing his sonship to God caused "his face to shine as the sun." (Matt. 17: 2.) There is also the story, already referred to, of a moment of intimate sharing with a small circle of his followers, when they affirm to him their belief in him as the fulfilment of his people's hopes for

Messianic leadership, and when he in his turn entrusted them with his own thought and purpose in his mission, and his conviction that suffering was inevitably bound up with its accomplishment. There is the story of a last desperate struggle in prayer, when death overshadowed him, to bring his will into harmony with what he believed to be the will of God; to hold his purpose clear even though it should lead him at thirty to his death. And finally there is the story of the outcome of that purpose in heroic death, and of faith in God's fatherhood affirmed in his extremity on the cross.

What shall we say of the inner life that brings such events to pass? Through these records, fragmentary as they are, we can discern the major outlines of a spiritual life that had a certain purpose at its center. That purpose was to follow the will of God, and this purpose in turn rested back upon a faith that men are called to be the sons of God, and on an experience of communion with God that realized that sonship. What distinguishes the religious life of Jesus from that of other great spiritual personalities in history is that this experience of sonship is so completely dominating for the whole of life. The record gives us no stories of tension caused by the sense of alienation from God, no times of depression and discouragement because sin has put a barrier between his soul and God. They show Jesus as unique in his realization of unbroken fellowship with God.

One needs only to recall the stories of other souls deeply sensitive to religious values and highly quickened by fellowship with God to realize the uniqueness of the story of Jesus. Isaiah, in his moment of ecstasy and vi-

sion, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, cried out, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips." Paul felt such discouragement with his own achievement and such alienation from God as a result of it that he exclaimed: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Both Augustine and St. Francis knew the restlessness of the soul that has not found its rest in God. Indeed, religious history testifies to the fact that the more deeply sensitive the person is to religious values, the greater is the anguish that sin creates in making separation of the soul from God, the greater is the perception of the meaning of this alienation, and hence the greater is the rapture of the return to fellowship.

In distinction from this kind of picture, the records of Jesus reveal his serene and unbroken realization of his sonship to God. Here was the highest sensitiveness to religious ideals and the fullest realization of fellowship with God. Here was a confident power to maintain that fellowship which did not suffer from any sense of despair or estrangement. The record does not fail to tell us of spiritual struggle, but it dwells on the fact that the struggle was triumphantly met. The lonely experience of temptation in the wilderness was completed with the affirmation of faith: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4: 10.) In Gethsemane, when Jesus faced the outcome of his ideals in martyrdom, it was the affirmation of his loyal sonship to God that was the victory: "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." (Luke 22: 42.) His outcry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27: 46) reveals spiritual as well as

physical agony, but Luke's story gives his final affirmation of faith, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23: 46.)

If we press back of the spiritual achievement to its sources, we find Jesus' life of prayer (particularly as Luke reveals it) controlling his attitudes and his activities. On the whole, all three of the synoptic writers are quite objective in their record of him. There is little of interpretive or explanatory matter. For the most part they are content to tell the story of his activity and teaching as they have received it, and to leave to the reader any attempt to understand the processes of heart and mind that made Jesus what he was. But Luke differs somewhat from the other two because of his interest in Jesus' life of prayer. He speaks of Jesus as praying at the time of his baptism, and at the time of his withdrawal to the desert to escape from the multitude that followed him. He tells how Jesus spent all night in prayer before he called his disciples, and how at the transfiguration it was as he was praying that his countenance was altered. It is Luke who tells how the disciples found Jesus in prayer when they asked him to teach them how to pray. As Luke thus records the story of Jesus' habitual practice of prayer, we feel that we are being let into the secret of his spiritual achievement. Here is the reason for that supreme power to realize his sonship to God.

But even more revealing to us than Luke's story of Jesus' recourse to God in prayer is the constant assumption on the part of all three of the synoptic writers that he thinks and speaks naturally of God as Father, lives naturally in filial relation to God, and assumes that this

relationship between himself and God is the mainspring of his life. Matthew tells the story of Jesus' saying, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight." (Matt. 11: 25-26.) All the synoptists think of this attitude of trust in God, this assumption that he is a child of God, this naturalness in expressing his relationship to God as characteristic of him. A modern interpreter, Professor Charles Guignebert, in his book, *Jesus*, comments on this aspect of Jesus' experience as follows:

A profound religious feeling, a deep and sincere faith fill his entire consciousness and radiate from him. (P. 217.) His religion is his whole life, and God is the very breath of his being. (P. 247.)

It is not primarily ecstatic vision which marks Jesus' communion with God. It is rather a fellowship which is constant, not fluctuating, not given to crises, but deep and serene, a controlling experience. Confident that he is a child of God, he finds the way to living consistently and uninterruptedly in that sonship. So markedly did he maintain this fellowship that it was the comment of his enemies at his crucifixion, that "he trusted on God." (Matt. 27: 43.)

As has been suggested above, we must recognize that this spiritual achievement in the maintenance of a constant fellowship with God did not come without discipline and struggle. It does not reveal itself as a gift from without, but as a growth from within. Glimpses of the striving needed to attain it come to us in those striking

figures of speech through which the temptation experience has been reported to us. Again we feel it in the story of his agony of choice on the night of his betrayal, and in the word to his disciples, reported by Luke: "Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations." (Luke 22: 28.) If we hold that these temptations were real ones, that suffering in the doing of God's will was unavoidable to him as it is to us, then his meaning for us as a spiritual leader is far greater than it would be if by some supernatural endowment of power he were exempted from the reality of spiritual struggle. If he actually knew our kind of life-struggle, then his achievement of living completely in fellowship with God and making God's will dominate all life's choices is supremely significant for us.

CHAPTER IV

JESUS' THOUGHT ABOUT HIMSELF

Closely connected with this question of Jesus' religious experience is that of his thought about himself and his work. Did he think of his mission as world-wide? Of himself as the founder of a new religion? As the expected Messiah of the Jews? The first two of these questions can be dismissed with a few words. As a member of his own race, and of his own time, Jesus accepted a Jewish milieu for his work, and spoke to his own people as the prophets before him had done. But he never set limits upon the area to which his gospel should be given. When the Syro-Phoenician woman asked for help, he gave it. He did not refuse to go to the centurion's house. He said that many would come from the east and west and sit at meat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matt. 8: 11.) And the implications of his teachings were inevitably universal. The requirements for membership in the Kingdom, as he thought of them, were not dependent upon race or nationality, but were rather certain qualities of heart and mind. The members of the Kingdom were people who were childlike in spirit, meek, and hungering after righteousness, having forgiveness in their hearts and penitence for their sins. These qualities may be the possession of a member of any race or nation. It was, to be sure, left for Paul the great missionary to the Gentiles to bring to pass in geographical and racial terms the uni-

versal implications of Jesus' teaching; but the impetus for Paul's work in breaking down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Greek was in the personality and message of Jesus.

There is no indication in the gospel record of Jesus' teaching that he thought of himself as the founder of a new religion. The dominant institutions of Jewish religion were accepted naturally by him as part of his own medium for the expression of his religious life—the Temple, the synagogue, the Scripture. He went to Jerusalem to participate in the religious festivals of his people. "He entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day" (Luke 4: 16). He began his ministry with a text from the prophet of the exile¹ (Luke 4: 18). When the lawyer put his question as to how he might inherit eternal life, Jesus answered, "What is written in the Law? how readest thou?" (Luke 10: 26.) Matthew reports him as saying explicitly, "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil." (Matt. 5: 17.) Although he was freely selective from his religious heritage, both critical and creative in his use of it, he never departed from it. He held it central both in his teaching and in his own religious life.

When Jesus spoke of his own work as teacher, he used the word "prophet." "No prophet is acceptable in his own country." (Luke 4: 24.) He took a prophet's word as the text for his own interpretation of religion, and

¹ This prophet has been called Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah, because his prophecies are found in Chapters 40-55 of the present book of Isaiah.

having read it, said, "Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4: 21.) As a prophet he worked with the materials of actual experience, and with the heritage of thought that his people possessed from the past. But as a prophet he was free in rejecting what seemed to him unworthy, and in criticizing what had been traditionally emphasized: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time . . . but I say unto you." (Matt. 5: 21-22.) As a prophet he relied not upon professional authority nor upon literalistic interpretations of the law as his criterion of value, but upon his own spiritual experience and insight. As we look back to him today, should we not think of him as taking his place in the great succession of Hebrew prophets, himself the highest peak in that mountain range of religious experience and leadership that thrust itself up from the terrain of Hebrew life?

The question of Jesus' belief in his own Messiahship is a much more difficult one. Jesus lived at a time when the expectancy was great among his people that a leader would come who would solve the pressing problem of their relationship to Rome. Beliefs in and hopes for such Messiahship had dominated the thought of the Hebrew people for centuries before his time, with varying applications to the particular problems that the successive generations had been called to face. Sometimes the religious aspects of the hoped-for leadership had been dominant, and sometimes the political aspects had seemed most important. Sometimes they had melted together into a hope for deliverance that was both political and religious. Political independence was important to

the Hebrews because it meant religious autonomy, and often these two desires had become one. With such an expectancy current in the group with which Jesus worked, with such ascendancy as was his in personality, in initiative, and in influence, it could not be otherwise than that his ministry should be thought of by many as the fulfilment of these hopes that had so long been cherished. Stories that show this popular ascription of Messiahship to him are those of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and of the talk about him by the two on the road to Emmaeus. Popular feeling about him is truly reflected in words that Luke reports as spoken by these two: "We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel." (Luke 24: 21.)

As to Jesus' own thought upon this matter we cannot fully know. We can infer that the common expectation of a Messiah would compel in him reflection upon his relationship to such hopes, especially when many who followed him expressed their belief that he was the promised deliverer. His influence over people, the size of his following would make it necessary for him to deliberate upon the character that his leadership should take. It looks as if Jesus' own thought of what his work should be differed radically from the commonly accepted views of Messiahship. If he accepted his people's ascription of Messiahship to him, he might seem to be denying his own ideal of what his ministry should be. In this conflict between his own and contemporary ideals of Messiahship, we can see meaning in Jesus' command to Peter to "tell no man" when Peter affirmed his faith in him as

Messiah; and also in Jesus' immediate sharing of his own thought that "the Son of man must suffer many things." (Mark 8: 31.) His own view then seems to be in harmony with that of the poet-prophet of the exile who portrayed a Suffering Servant of the Lord.

At all events do not the records show plainly enough that Jesus' thought upon his mission was mainly concerned with a message that his people needed and a work that needed to be done for them? There is nothing to indicate any interest on his part in an official title to be assumed by him. He always subordinated the thought of Messiahship to a larger idea of a new spiritual order that he hoped was coming soon. The gospels show him to be far more concerned with the Kingdom than with the one who should bring it in. What he talked about, and what he hoped for, was this new spiritual order which would be the embodiment in a community of the sovereign will of God. When at Caesarea Philippi he assented to his disciples' affirmation that he was the Messiah, his response to them was not concerned with the people's acceptance of him as such, but with the fact that his ideal could not be carried out without his suffering for it. "The Son of man must suffer many things."

CHAPTER V

THE ORIGINALITY OF JESUS

We come now to the last of the historical questions that we put before us at the beginning of this study: In what does the originality of Jesus consist? Other religious leaders had tried to bring men to God and to help them to understand God's will. The prophets had spoken with the authority of great conviction when they had said to the people, "Thus saith the Lord." Jesus made use of ideas that were already familiar in the heritage of Jewish religious life. The Kingdom was a concept long known and honored in Hebrew religion. In the Book of Psalms we find God spoken of as Father. (Ps. 103: 13.) Jeremiah had emphasized the inward nature of religion, saying of the new covenant that it must be written on the heart. (Jer. 31: 31-33.) The Hebrew law had commanded men to love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves. (Deut. 6: 4-5; Levit. 19: 18.) Isaiah of the exile had sung his songs honoring the Suffering Servant, and revealing a profound spiritual conception of service. (Is. 52: 13ff.; 53.) The book of Jonah had enunciated its great doctrine of the universal concern of God for all mankind, and even the Proverb writers had issued the command: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat, And if he be thirsty, give him water to drink." (Prov. 25: 21.) There are those who maintain that every teaching that we have from Jesus can be paralleled either in the Old Testament or

in Jewish literature contemporary with him. Where then does the originality of Jesus lie?

It is in the examination of Jesus' life and teaching as a whole that we must seek the answer to this question, not in the isolation of some one saying or experience that cannot be paralleled anywhere else in history. It is true that Jesus was a child of his own people and of his own time. He did make use of that spiritual heritage that was his from the historic past of Judaism, selecting from it that which was vital, enduring, and authentic to true religion, and rejecting what seemed to him of inferior worth. He had the insight to know what was of true and abiding value. He so entered into the meaning of that heritage that he could speak with authority about it, and not as the scribes. And historically the fact remains that Judaism continued its own line of development, whereas a new stream of religious interpretation springs from Jesus. A new spiritual power in him must be sought to account for that fact in religious history.

Part of that newness we find in the fact that Jesus treated all that he had selected from Jewish religious thought and experience with new emphasis. He put greater stress on motives than on outward actions. He laid new emphasis on the attitude of heart and mind, and made central to all his ethics the inward intention and the childlike spirit. He brought fresh consideration of the ethical values in life by treating them all in relation to their ultimate meanings. He taught that one should love one's enemies *because* thus they fulfil their sonship to God (Matt. 5: 44); he taught that men should be perfect *because* their heavenly Father is perfect (Matt.

5: 48); in the parable of the last judgment he taught that such acts as feeding the hungry and visiting the sick or those in prison were good not merely as acts of compassion but as done to him who represents the Father's righteous will. (Matt. 25.) Thus Jesus knit into an indissoluble unity the ethical and the religious life. They are not, in his thought of them, two separate phases of man's existence, but two sides of the same experience.

But most of all, Jesus' unique contribution to religion was in the dynamic of his personality as identified with his message. Behind the teaching was the life, giving fresh and vital meaning to the teaching. When he talked of God as Father, he was sharing a living faith upon which he based everything. He made the doing of God's will an experience that was realizable through the fact that he himself was living out that will. When he urged his followers to accept the conditions of life that the Kingdom demanded of them, he was speaking to them of what he himself practiced. He did not merely expound what the meaning of the Kingdom was; he shared his own ardent faith and hope that the Kingdom was realizable through the power of God. When he urged men to find their lives by losing them in loving service, he was but bringing to expression in words what was being even more vitally expressed in the way he actually lived. What he taught about religious fellowship was a living reality to him in prayer. What he commended to his followers as the good life was what he himself had put into practice. This was the new increment in his teaching that gave it its dynamic appeal.

This is originality, not in the literal sense of words never before spoken, but in the deeper sense of a living potency that could be gained in no other possible way.

We now find ourselves beginning to deal with the second kind of question that we proposed at the beginning of our study. As we try to assess the originality of Jesus we find that we are making our estimate in terms of his value for all time. The ultimate significance of his personality and teaching are part of the answer. And it is in this same realm of thought that we find the answer to the question of the meaning of Jesus' death. That death has unique meaning for us, not merely because a great man died heroically for his ideal, but because of the peculiar blending of personality with ideal that this death symbolizes. He had said: "Whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister." (Mark 10: 43.) "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matt. 16: 25.) And all his life's activity had centered about that conviction. It was all of a piece—the ideal, the life that fulfilled it, and the death that was the inevitable fruitage of living the ideal in a world that was its denial. As Prof. Walter Horton says, in a very real sense he gave himself in that death "for us all." "He gave himself in so dramatic and tragic and compelling a fashion that no man to whom the gift is fairly presented can refuse it, unless he is blinded by prejudice or unless his soul is so narrow and constricted that it cannot expand to take in and compre-

hend so great a boon.”¹ This death has become to us the eternal symbol of the truth expressed by the Fourth Evangelist: “Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” (John 12: 24-25.)

¹ W. M. Horton, *A Psychological Approach to Theology*, p. 144.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTERPRETATION OF JESUS IN HISTORY

Thus we have begun already our attempt to state the meaning of Jesus for us today. We have not thus far been concerned to assemble the creedal statements about him, the historical formulas, nor even as yet the record of Christian history that testifies to lives transformed and values and life-purposes made strong through him. But it will be well now to turn for a moment to that story before we begin the attempt to state in our own terms what Jesus means to us today.

It is an impressive story, this record of how through him all sorts of people down through the centuries have found health and faith, have faced difficulties with hope and courage, have been freed from fear, have been sure of God's forgiveness for their sin, have been lifted out of discouragement and made strong to start again, have been empowered to face responsibility, have discovered how to pray, and have felt God's presence with them—all through him. The creative impulse that started from his life in the first century in Palestine has gone on increasing in force rather than diminishing in all the ages since, as this testimony to his power to transform lives has massed itself from generation to generation.

His creative work began with a little group of people who followed him in the villages and towns and out on the hills in Galilee. It continued in the communities that made up the early church. It followed them as they

grew in numbers and in influence throughout the Roman Empire. It has penetrated the history of the western world, pushing its influence into all phases of its life, and, through the missionary enterprise, into every corner of the civilized world. It has made saints, apostles, martyrs, evangelists, missionaries, teachers, prophets. It has taken humble, unnoticed lives by multitudes under the spell of its creative influence, and has liberated them and transformed them and made them able to cope with their world.

Interpretations of Jesus' meaning to great souls have added to this historic stream of truth about him, bringing the experience of him into the concrete ways of speech, often with a poetic beauty and power of religious feeling that have made them a medium of worship for the church or for individuals. It is true that this story of Jesus' meaning in Christian history is the unfolding of a religion centering about Jesus which began almost at once after his death and has continued until today. Let us look briefly at this impressive structure of religious thought that has been built about him.

Of those in Jesus' own generation who found him central to religious experience, Paul is the one who gave most exalted expression to his meaning for life and faith. His letters, which were so treasured by the early church that they came into use as scripture before the close of the New Testament period (II Peter 3: 16), have been used in all the ages since as media for the expression of Christian faith and aspiration. Paul had found in Jesus freedom from his old sense of defeat as he had tried to live by the Jewish legal system of religion, and had

failed. When through Jesus he made the great discovery that one could live "by the Spirit" he was liberated and felt that he had become "more than conqueror." It was a mystical relationship with Jesus which brought him this new power, and he called it "being in Christ." So to live was to be a new creature. The universal meaning of such an empowering through religious fellowship was what impressed Paul most, and this he saw as breaking down the "middle wall of partition" which in that particular age and society separated Jews and Greeks. In this religious fellowship, Paul saw the oneness of mankind, since in Christ Jesus there could be "neither Jew nor Greek" but all were "one man," "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 25-28.) In his letters Paul shared this experience with those whom he persuaded to think of life in similar terms. And often his expression of it is so beautiful in form as well as in meaning that it takes its place among the classic utterances of religious faith that the race has produced.

Religious devotion to Jesus found early embodiment also in the stories of his birth which, between the time of the writing of Mark's gospel and that of Matthew and Luke, had grown up as popular expressions of the wonder evoked from the early church by the personality of Jesus. Exquisite as these narratives are in their bodying forth in story of a pure faith in Jesus, of a trust in him to bring peace on earth and good will to men who had been "sore afraid," still they are not our way of bringing testimony to the beauty and significance of Jesus' life. They reveal to us the first-century way of expressing reverent wonder at what Jesus was and did, and

as such they are infinitely precious to us. That legends of this sort should grow about a figure of such proportions as Jesus had become to them was natural, not to say inevitable, in a naïve and legend-making age. It is a matter of great significance to us that these stories had such beauty of thought, such simplicity and such a poetic quality, and so strong a devotional spirit that they are really worthy to be taken up into the experience of more sophisticated ages and used by people who would not have found it reasonable or natural to express themselves so. To Christians in later ages they have become symbolic and poetic expressions of their own faith in and wonder at the personality of Jesus. They were true to the thought and feeling of first-century Christians. They express symbolically the wonder that Christians of all the centuries have felt for Jesus.

Another significant expression from the early Christian community of the meaningfulness of Jesus for religious experience is found in the gospel of John. This later gospel is not primarily a biography of Jesus, in the sense that his life-story was the central matter of the writing. This life-story was sketched, but subordinated throughout the gospel to a setting forth of the meaning of his personality for religious experience. This gospel is, indeed, a religious meditation revealing a mystical experience of great depth on the part of the one who wrote. He had found through Jesus such nourishment for his spiritual life that he could speak of him as the bread of life and water of life. He had found him also a source of truth, so that he could speak of him as the light of the world, and as one who shares with men the truth that

makes them free. In Jesus he felt assured that life was really eternal in its nature, stronger than death if it was lived in mystical fellowship with God, so that he could say of Jesus that he was the resurrection and the life. So completely did this writer find Jesus adequate for his spiritual needs that he could say of him that he was "the way, the truth, and the life." This interpretation also has aspects that belong distinctly to early Christian times. Philosophically, it is founded upon a particular type of thought, characteristic of the school of Alexandria in the late first and early second century. It identifies Jesus with the Logos or Word of God, which was a favorite Alexandrian concept. It lays emphasis on certain aspects of Jesus' own experience that are harmonious with this concept: for example, on his more than human knowledge and his more than human power. But in the midst of certain special emphases that belong to a particular time, we find in the gospel a larger element of thought that is timeless in its nature. It takes up into poetic expression some of the permanent and abiding meanings of Jesus' life for religious experience always. Here is another classic expression of the significance of his personality for religion in all time.

We might go on through the New Testament and through Christian history and think over these remarkable testimonies to the significance of Jesus' personality for spiritual life. We should find many and varying ways of expressing it. There was, for example, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews who, thinking in Platonic terms, but also in the language and symbolism of the Jewish sacrificial system, found it natural to speak of

Jesus as "Our Great High Priest," through whose death a redemption took place, so that "he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God." (Heb. 7: 25.) There was the author of the First Epistle of Peter, who found in Jesus the great exemplar of suffering nobly borne, whom not having seen all may love. (I Peter 1: 6-8). There was the author of the Pastoral letters (I and II Timothy, and Titus), who spoke of "our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." There was one, John of Patmos, who wrote out of persecution, hoping as other apocalyptic seers had hoped for a speedy end of the world, who could think of Jesus as the one to whom with God should belong the kingdoms of the world.

These New Testament expressions of Jesus' significance to men have special meaning for us, not merely because they are the closest we have in point of time to the life of Jesus, but because they embody in themselves a particularly vital and creative religious experience discovered and participated in through him. The memories of those who had known Jesus were directly accessible to the New Testament writers, either through the spoken word or through the early written records of his doings and sayings. In the primitive Christian community was all the fire and intensity of pioneer experience. The transcendent, creative personality of Jesus lived in their midst, a spiritual presence, the focus about which all their life centered. In him, they lived, and thought, and shared their common aspiration and hope. They wrote out of a passionate religious conviction.

They wrote out of exalted devotion to the personality of Jesus. They wrote with a sense of power that came through the possession of his spirit. As a result, they gave birth to a literature that has had a central and unique place in the lives of Christians in all the centuries since. They gave living and permanent expression both to the story of the great beginnings in which they were participators, and to their faith in Jesus and to the new life and joy that they had found in him.

As we think of the interpretations of Jesus that the centuries have brought, we want to recognize that those in the four gospels and in Paul are particularly significant for us. Thus far in this study, we have confined ourselves mainly to the first three gospels in our attempt to discover the events of Jesus' life and his teachings. But now the significance of the Fourth Gospel and Paul's letters needs to be recognized. Here were two great interpretations of Jesus which have timeless meaning for all generations of Christians. If we turn to the synoptic gospels for the record of the activity of Jesus, we turn to Paul and the Fourth Gospel for the equally needed record of the meaning of Jesus for religious experience. Here is the witness of what it is to have "that mind which was also in Christ Jesus." Here is the record of what it is to have one's purpose spiritualized by an experience of Christ, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. This is the story of Jesus Christ written in terms of human experience. Here we see how the follower of Christ is enabled to live the eternal life in the midst of time. In one we see the gospel of love

interpreted in terms of heroic character (I Cor. 13); in the other we see it given its place as the vital center of the experience of God (John 15).

We should also go on to think of the creedal formulations of the meaning of Jesus that were characteristic of the third and fourth centuries. Baffled to explain in any adequate way the moral and spiritual supremacy of Jesus, the church turned to the world of contemporary philosophy, and tried to state, in terms of a dualistic system of thought characteristic of that time, what they believed to be the reason for this supremacy. He must, they thought, belong to that supernatural order of being which they had set over against the natural order. Affirmations of divinity—that he was “Very God of Very God,” “of one substance with the Father”—tried to put into words that were familiar in the philosophical language of the day their sense of the redemptive power of his life and death, and their conviction that his life was representative of the deepest reality in the universe. Again, their modes of expression were not the ones that we should choose today. They used language that had the limitations of their knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, all the centuries have found in such phrasing something of truth that can be appropriated and helpfully used in religious experience.

We might multiply these testimonies down through the Christian centuries, speaking of the further interpretation of the meaning of Jesus, by Augustine, and St. Francis, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, by mystics of the medieval church, by John Wyclif, Martin Luther, John Wesley, George Fox, and all the host of significant in-

interpreters of Jesus through the ages. The variety of the experience that Christian history records is itself an impressive fact. No life has begun to touch so many other lives to transform them, to make them rich and overflowing as has this life of Jesus of Nazareth. Some of the expressions of his meaning are in poems, some in hymns and works of devotion, some in formal doctrines, and some in works of theology and philosophy. Some are in letters from friend to friend and some in sermons and tracts that deal with the problems of society.

This many-sided, varied experience of religion, this renewal and transformation of life that has taken place through the personality of Jesus throughout Christian history is what many mean when they speak of "the living Christ." For others, the experience of the living Christ would take on a more metaphysical aspect. They would testify to his meaning as a symbol of the ultimate religious reality in our universe. In his figure they would see forever symbolized the meeting of the infinite with the finite, the transcendent with the immanent—reality made apprehensible in a divine-human life. Thus to them Jesus has made known the otherwise unknowable, and is the symbolic figure that human beings need to make real to themselves what is ultimate and what is infinite. Whether in terms of the transformation of life, or in these terms of metaphysical reality symbolized in life, the influence of Jesus has been a continuous one from the first century down to the present. Christians have felt themselves empowered to meet life, lifted to fellowship with God, brought into the presence of the ultimate realities, or all of these blended into one,

through their varied experiences of the personality of Jesus.

One cannot think over this stream of Christian history without feeling what massive testimony it is to the creative power of its central figure. But impressive and moving as it is, it does not relieve us from the responsibility to discover what Jesus can mean to our own generation. The answer to the question of the significance of Jesus for *us* must be stated in terms not of the first century, nor of any intervening century between that one and ours. We must find the answer in terms of the values that *we* cherish. Do we find in him some unique quality or value that makes it right for us to use toward Jesus the word "Savior"? Do we as well as the ancients and the medievalists, the reformers and the Victorians—all those who have preceded us in Christian history—really find him the center of our religious lives?

CHAPTER VII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS FOR TODAY

What we have said so far has to do with history. Now we turn to today. What shall *we* say of Jesus today? What does he mean for us? As the life of the world goes on, will his significance for human life continue? Can the modern Christian, looking out upon the tangled world we know, find the solution of his problems or the renewal of his life in the experience of a Jew in Palestine in the first century? Was the ideal of living that was taught and exemplified in that simple, agricultural, Oriental society an ideal that we, in our complicated western civilization, can find adequate and honestly follow today? How could any such ideal have solutions for our problems of race and industrial relationships, our problems of poverty and unemployment, of war and imperialism, our problems of social organization and class rivalries?

We should face at the outset the necessity of acknowledging the limitations of Jesus' knowledge. A child today has more information about the physical world in which we live than Jesus could have had. The beginner in scientific study today is in possession of facts about the nature of our universe about which Jesus never dreamed. Economics and sociology as academic disciplines have had their birth since his day. History and literature have been in the making for nineteen centuries and more. As man's heritage of knowledge has

constantly accumulated, his ethical and moral world has become vastly more complicated. With every addition to our knowledge, with every widening of our ethical and moral horizon, new factors are brought in that must be reckoned with in any solving of problems. Treasured beliefs of earlier days may be overthrown by new knowledge, and it must be the constant attitude of the searcher after truth to be willing to relinquish even what is dear in old beliefs and ideals when new light reveals some weakness in their structure, or some inconsistency in them with what science and philosophy today have established as truth. This attitude should be present in our estimate of the teaching and personality of Jesus. If in the light of modern knowledge and in comparison with modern values, Jesus' ideal seems inadequate or outmoded, then we should be willing to acknowledge its failure, and start new with some new ideal worthy of the task to which it must be set.

But when we examine the evidence of history and consider the Christian ideal in relation to present-day intellectual and spiritual needs, we find in point of fact that the effect of wider knowledge, of more advanced thinking, of accumulated experience, has been not to detract from, but rather to deepen and intensify our appreciation of the worth and significance of Jesus' ideal. The testimony of the years has been to establish the validity of Jesus' estimate of human personality as the supreme value in our universe. The testimony of the years supports his views that personality is fulfilled not in self-seeking, but in service. No philosophy and no science has offered a principle for the governing of all

human relations to supersede that ideal of self-realization through service. We know from years of human experimentation now that whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and that whosoever shall lose his life shall save it. Interpretations of the universe that commend themselves to us as the highest that modern philosophy has been able to produce are in harmony with his intuitive understanding of the nature of things—views that our universe can be trusted, that at heart it is purposive, intelligent, and responsive to man's higher nature and effort, views that man at his best can work co-operatively and lovingly with this indwelling spirit of our universe, and can thus bring better things to pass in himself and in society. The movements of our time which commend themselves to our judgment, to the universal judgment of today, as the purposeful activity of man at its highest—efforts for democracy; for brotherhood among races, classes, nations; for a juster distribution of the goods of life; for equality in privilege; for intellectual freedom; and for the spiritual triumph over selfishness, materialism and greed—are (whether they are recognized as such or not) movements in the direction of achieving Jesus' ideal for man. These are the movements which in our modern situation are helping to answer his prayer: Thy kingdom come. There are great areas of our life where such movements have scarcely begun to work. We find those areas in every phase of life, individual, national, and international. We do not hesitate when we recognize them to say, here is where the task of today is: to work for Jesus' ideal of the Kingdom, for bringing the righteous will of God to prevail on earth.

We have been looking at Jesus' ideal in the light of what modern thoughtful people hold as their standard of life. It is significant that we cannot do this without at once finding ourselves and our society condemned by Jesus' ideal, and being compelled at once to say: this ideal goes far beyond the best that man has been able thus far not only to put into practice but even to conceive. That is what we are inevitably led to do as we think of the areas of life where frustration and injustice and enmity are controlling. We know that it is the task of today to bring them under the domination of Jesus' ideal for life.

Those who have questioned the value of Jesus as a spiritual leader, because he gave no practical program for reform to bring his ideal to realization, have failed to see that herein lay the power of the ideal to keep pace with and to be always in advance of all progress and all achievement. It bound itself to no one type of culture, nor did it limit itself to the standards of any one age. Every succeeding age has had to discover the way to bring the Christian ideal to life in terms of its own conception of society. For some ages, consideration for the less privileged has expressed itself in the giving of alms; for ours the inadequacy of that method is obvious. Our kind of society demands regulation of the distribution of goods, if the same ideal is to be at all adequately fulfilled.

On the other hand, those who have criticized the teaching of Jesus because as it bore on specific cases that were brought to him for judgment, it accepted customs incompatible with our notions of social justice today, have failed to recognize that such applications to an

existing social order were never at the sacrifice of the fundamental view of the supreme worth to God of human personality. When he was asked to deal with such specific questions as divorce, the giving of alms, rewards and punishments, he must do so in relation to existing conditions in the social order that he knew. But constantly his teaching was moving that social order in the direction of the fulfilment of the ideal which is still the goal of our progress. Steadily that principle was affirmed when specific courses of action might have been indicated instead. When men asked him how often a brother should be forgiven, he answered with an expression that meant a limitless spending of the forgiving spirit. When they asked him what acts should be allowed on the Sabbath day, he answered with an assertion which meant that personality should take precedence over institutions. When in answer to the command to love his neighbor, a lawyer asked him "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied with a story of a neighbor who was characterized only as "a certain man" who was in trouble and needing help.

But when we have recognized that the teaching of Jesus still stands adequate to meet the spiritual needs of humanity today, when we have realized that his ideal has actually transcended the changes in thought and social organization, so that we can test our modern society by it and find it unrealized but challenging to us today, we still have before us the question of the present meaning of his personality to us in relation to that ideal. Have we said it all when we have affirmed that Jesus was a great teacher—the greatest of the prophets, if we will—

and that his teaching, still our ideal, is the sum of his meaning for us? Our answer to this question lies here: Jesus is now, as he has been all through the Christian centuries, more than a teacher of ethics, more than the spokesman of a great system of teaching. Behind the teaching is the life, the concrete embodiment of the ideal in living, that carries over these centuries an enthusiasm, a winsomeness, a power that no system of ethics could ever give. Here is incentive to our achievement: that we see the ideal actually at work. We could be urged in words to humility, to singleness of heart, to forgiveness, or honesty, or any other virtue; but the appeal could never be as effective in mere words as it is in a life that makes the teaching vivid in experience. In the personality of Jesus, we see courage at its best, but balanced by a humility that asked nothing for itself; an adherence to principle that had its home in attitudes and motives rather than in mere action, and that knew no compromise, but with it an infinite gentleness and tenderness toward the sinner and the weak; honesty that went down to the very springs of life but at the same time a largeness of outlook on life that refused to enter into the discussion of petty points of external conduct, and kept him moving always in the realm of eternal values. In Jesus, we see a consciousness of mission, of divine appointment to the giving of a message and to a work in the world, such as no other life in history affords, but with it went a forgetfulness of self that led him to suffering and the laying down of life. The concreteness of achievement, the urgent appeal of the good life fully lived, the winsomeness of personality that made the com-

mon people hear him gladly, are behind and underneath the ethical teaching, so that today we find in the historic life of Jesus an incentive to victorious living that no sermons on abstract virtue could ever carry.

But the present meaning of Jesus for our lives lies not only in the fact of his ethical achievement nor in the contagion of his personality. Through the record of his life among men, we are led into the secret of his power to live out his ideal. It was not simply a *good* life; it was a spiritual life. It was a life of unbroken communion with God, so that God could speak through him and work through him in the world of human experience. Faith in the power of God to bring to pass the highest that we know in ideal becomes ours through Jesus' revelation of God's power working in him. Jesus led men to God. He did not ask for worship for himself. His greatest hope was that he might make God real to men. Thus we find him most meaningful today as an historic person, who so thought and lived in the presence of God that God's will could be made known in him, and God himself made real to men through him. It is thus that Jesus gives us today a genuine experience of God. Our appeal to him today is not for authority, but for the quickening of our life with God through the revelation that he gave of how a human life can reflect and be filled with God's life.

As we think of the present significance of Jesus, still another factor presses for recognition. Jesus brought an ideal for life that has stood the test of centuries and still stands supreme, ahead of all our progress and achievement. Through the power of his personality, he still

makes that ideal winsome and compelling. Through his life of unbroken fellowship with God he has shown us the way to the achievement of the ideal and gives us a present experience of God. Our trust in him is bounded by no conditions of the past; his thinking and his living are the effective inspiration of the best thinking and living of today. In him lie our hope and faith for the future of our world. Here is the eternal quality in the world's experience of Jesus. Here is the limitless, universal aspect of the values that we find in him.

Up to our own day, the Christian ideal has met an ever-changing world. A steady evolution has been in progress, sometimes in the slow gradual processes of growth, sometimes with the more cataclysmic methods of revolution, so that intellectual horizons have steadily widened, new patterns for the organization of society have been worked out, new concepts of science have come into being, and new moralities have been evolved to meet new conditions of life in new commercial and industrial worlds; new standards of justice have had to come as social institutions have become more complex and involved. We cannot be content with any concept that leaves static any corner of our universe.

Through all these centuries of change the figure of Jesus has had its greatest significance through the fact of his creative moral power. Through him new values have been seen in the new times. New insights have been gained through him for the solving of new problems. New thoughts of God have grown to meet the new religious demands of an evolving race of men and an evolving society. Should we face the future with any fear that

this creative power will fail our children as they go forward in the future? Today in the light of the thinking and living of Jesus, men are convicted of an overwhelming sense of sin in their failure to make the social order of today express the moral purpose of God. Today they know that the God whom Jesus revealed is a God who works in the world to bring goodness to pass, and who through human beings is striving to achieve a social order that is moral in its nature and capable of expressing love. Today Jesus exemplifies to us the supreme dedication of life to that purpose, and is the eternal symbol of God suffering for the needs of humanity, and the eternal summons to us to make his work our own. Thus we know that in the deepest sense of the word Jesus is still our Savior. As he thus interprets to us the central and crucial problems of our age, and calls to us for their solution; as he reveals to us God's will and way for their solution, so is our faith established that he will be forever meaningful in the spiritual lives of men. To the deepest spiritual needs of the past, Jesus has been the answer; the highest, most purposeful effort and thought in our life today are in accordance with his leading and inspiration; in him are centered our faith and hope for the future of mankind. It is therefore with a profound sense of their truth as speaking the eternal and universal meaning of Jesus that we take for ourselves and for our children's children the words which the first evangelist represents Jesus as speaking when he was parted from his disciples: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

APPENDIX

THE SOURCES

The four gospels are practically our only sources of knowledge about Jesus' life. A very few sayings, such as the one in Acts 20: 35, or those found in the papyri of the third and fourth centuries, have been cherished independently and have come down to us through other channels. But for any full knowledge of what Jesus said and did, we are dependent ultimately on the four New Testament gospels.

Of these, the fourth, the gospel of John, which was written considerably later than the other three, is usually considered in a class by itself. According to its author's own statement (John 20: 30, 31) it was written to fulfil a different purpose from the other three. It intended not merely to chronicle the life of Jesus, but to reveal the meaning of his personality for religious experience. It is a meditation upon that theme, and might be called a devotional biography. As such, it belongs primarily to the literature of spiritual interpretation rather than to the materials of history.

As for the other three gospels, it is usually held that Mark was written earliest, about 70 A. D., and was used by Matthew and Luke as a source for the outline of Jesus' ministry. These three were probably all written between 70 and 100 A. D. Since Matthew and Luke both contain considerably more than Mark does, particularly of the teaching of Jesus, and often report this teaching very similarly, it is assumed that they both depended also upon a second source now lost. The symbol "Q" has been adopted to designate this document. (*See Raven: The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, Cambridge University Press, p. 163ff., for a view of what this document contained.)

The probable stages in the process by which our present gospels came into being are the following:

Sayings and stories of Jesus told orally

Collections of these stories and sayings written and handed about in the Christian communities

One such collection, "Q" (now lost), largely sayings,
probably quite widely read

Mark written

Matthew and Luke written, employing Mark and "Q"
as sources

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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A Jewish scholar's account of the Palestine of Jesus' day.

Simkhovitch, Vladimir G. *Toward the Understanding of Jesus*. Macmillan. \$1.00.

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Rihbany, Abraham M. *The Syrian Christ*. Houghton Mifflin. \$3.00.

A Syrian's explanation of Syrian customs and modes of speech as they help us to understand Jesus.

LIVES OF JESUS

Bosworth, Edward I. *The Life and Teaching of Jesus*. Macmillan. \$2.00.

Not a new book, but still one of the best full treatments of Jesus' life and teaching.

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A sympathetic and warmly appreciative study of the personality of Jesus.

Kent, Charles Foster. *The Life and Teachings of Jesus* (The Historical Bible). Scribner. \$1.50.

A textbook that will be particularly helpful to those who wish to study the life of Jesus by themselves.

Glover, T. R. *The Jesus of History*. Association Press. \$1.50.

Especially effective in pointing out the human elements in the gospel story.

Raven, C. E. and Eleanor. *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*. Macmillan. \$1.50.

Uniquely helpful in giving the text of the gospels, with a separate printing of Q, together with a discussion of the sources, the background of history, and the ministry and teaching of Jesus.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Stevens, George B. *The Teaching of Jesus*. Macmillan. \$1.00.

A clear and scholarly statement of the major emphases of Jesus' teaching.

Scott, Ernest F. *The Kingdom and the Messiah*. Scribner. \$3.50.

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The best book available on this phase of Jesus' teaching.
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NOTE—Many will find helpful in this connection the volume by Professor Adelaide T. Case of Teachers College, Columbia University: *As Modern Writers See Jesus*. Pilgrim Press. \$1.25.

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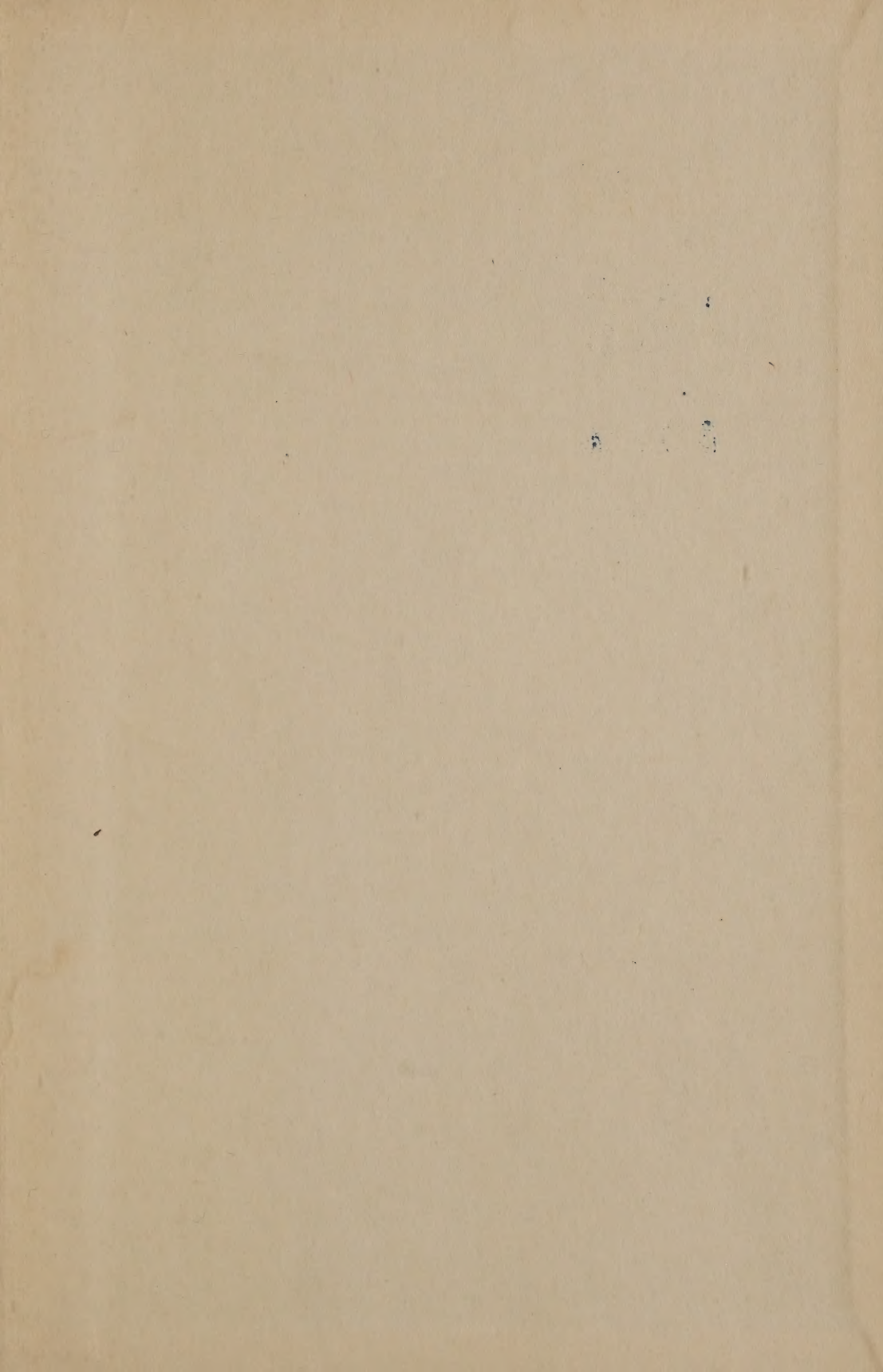
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